

U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO Louise Oliver
Remarks at a Reception in Honor of Lydia Cacho Ribeiro,
2008 Winner of the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize
October 28, 2008

Good evening everyone, and welcome. We are delighted to have you join us in a celebration of the UNESCO / Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom prize, and to help us honor the 2008 recipient of that prize, Lydia Cacho Ribeiro.

It seems like yesterday that we had the privilege of honoring the 2006 recipient of that prize, the talented and courageous journalist from Lebanon, May Chidiac. After recovering from extremely serious injuries from an assassination attempt, May returned to her life as a journalist in Lebanon and continues to play a very public and influential role in her country.

Another very courageous individual is the 2002 winner of the World Press Freedom Prize, who is here with us this evening. Mr. Geoffrey Nyarota is an award-winning Zimbabwean journalist and author. In 1999, he founded the Daily News, the country's only independent daily newspaper. Mr. Nyarota survived an assassination attempt in 2000, but in 2001, a bomb destroyed the newspaper's printing press. After being fired as editor from the Daily News 2002, Mr. Nyarota moved to the United States where he currently runs an online newspaper.

In addition to being a journalist, this year's awardee, Lydia Cacho Ribeiro, is an author, feminist, and human rights activist. She has written hundreds of news articles, as well as poetry and non-fiction. Ms. Cacho was described by the journalist, Marianne Pearl, as a "woman of great strength and courage, and who is deeply committed to ethical journalism and the advancement of human rights in Mexico for the long haul."

I know that Ms. Cacho is passionate about fighting child pornography and trafficking in persons, and in order to help women and children in need, she has founded a shelter in Cancun, Mexico. She is another extraordinary woman whose energy, courage, and determination know no bounds.

Because Ms. Cacho will be speaking at the symposium tomorrow, I will not say anything more about her at this time. Instead, I simply want to congratulate you, Ms. Cacho, on behalf of everyone here, on having received the 2008 UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, and to thank you for honoring us with your presence this evening.

I also want to welcome my good friend, Mr. James Ottaway, Jr. Mr. Ottaway is the President of the Ottaway Foundation, which in addition to the Cano Foundation and the Jyllands Posten/Politiken Newspaper, sponsors the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize. Mr. Ottaway has had a long career in journalism, starting first as a reporter in

1960, then working as bureau chief, editor and publisher at several Ottawa newspapers, then serving as the CEO of Ottawa Newspapers, and finally becoming the Chairman of its Board of Directors. Mr. Ottaway also served for ten years as chairman of the World Press Freedom Committee, an umbrella group of media organizations fighting against restrictions on press freedoms around the world.

Jim, as a fellow American, I am pleased and proud to have you here this evening, and I want to thank you for all you have done over the years to help support a free and independent press, as well as for the support that you are giving UNESCO, which will help it maintain its leadership role in promoting freedom of expression worldwide. As you know, this is an area of particular significance for us Americans, as UNESCO's attempts to limit freedom of the press twenty five years ago played a major role in President Reagan's decision to withdraw from UNESCO in 1984.

The fact that UNESCO now raises its voice in defense of a free press has been very important in helping to create positive opinions by Americans towards UNESCO. And speaking of Americans, I'd also like to welcome Ambassador Christopher Egan who is also here with us this evening, and who serves as the U.S. Ambassador to the OECD.

And finally, I would like to give a special welcome to my good friend the Ambassador from Mexico to UNESCO, His Excellency Ambassador Homero Aridjis Fuentes. In addition to being one of Mexico's most accomplished and well-known writers, Ambassador Fuentes is a living example of the phrase "love conquers all". When the Ambassador met his future wife, Betty, who unfortunately could not be with us tonight, he could not speak a word of English, and Betty, an American, could not speak a word of Spanish. However, that potential obstacle proved to be no obstacle at all, as they fell in love at first sight, and have now been married for over forty years.

So after that very romantic story, let me now turn the microphone over to my friend and colleague, Mr. Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Communication and Information, who will explain why the UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize is one of UNESCO's most important initiatives.

But first I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Khan, for having organized tomorrow's symposium, at which you have brought together four of the twelve World Press freedom award winners, with a fifth giving a video message. It would have been nice to have had all twelve winners at the symposium, but unfortunately the 2007 winner from Russia and the 1999 winner from Mexico are deceased, and I am told that the 2000 winner from Syria and the 1998 winner from Nigeria are unreachable. I understand that the 2004 winner lives in poor health in Spain after finally being released from a Cuban prison, and I have no idea what has happened to the 2005 and 1997 winners from China. We are

proud of all of these journalists, and are pleased that they have been honored by UNESCO.

So now let us hear from Mr. Khan, after which we will hear a few words from Mr. Ottaway. Thank you Mr. Khan and Mr. Ottaway. While I wait for someone to get me a glass of champagne so that we can toast Lydia Cacho, let me say that during my first year at UNESCO, I noticed that numerous bulletins kept being issued by the Director General deploring the murder of yet another journalist. Eventually I decided to keep all those bulletins in a special file. My file has now become very thick, and it just keeps growing. It is high time, therefore, that we focus on this topic, as it is imperative that we support journalists worldwide, and the principle that the press must be free and independent. Tomorrow's International Symposium on Freedom of Expression will give us an opportunity to do that, as well as to congratulate UNESCO for its leadership in this important area.

And now I'd like to raise a glass to both our World Press Freedom winners, Lydia and Geoffrey, and to thank them for the work that they do and for the courage that they have displayed. Congratulations to you both.